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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women: implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern

Statement submitted by Bahá'í International Community, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.

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The Bahá'í International Community is pleased that women's health was identified as a critical area of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action and that the Commission on the Status of Women is focusing global attention on this vital issue. The Bahá'í International Community, which actively collaborates with the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, and other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations on promoting women's health, participated most recently in the Expert Group Meeting on Women and Health: Mainstreaming the Gender Perspective into the Health Sector, held in Tunisia in September/October 1998.

Since the Commission discusses actions that Governments, United Nations agencies, and non-governmental organizations might take to improve the health of women and to empower women to participate fully in the affairs of the world, we offer the following points for consideration:

(a) When women enter the arenas of law and politics and when their voices are heard in the council chambers of the world, they will be instrumental in ending war and freeing vast resources for peaceful pursuits. The enormous energy wasted on war, the Bahá'í community asserts, will be consecrated to such ends as the extermination of disease, the

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raising of the standard of physical health, the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, the prolongation of human life, and the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of humanity;

(b) Women's health is important not only to women but to their families, their communities, and the world as a whole. In the Bahá'í view, the very progress of civilization depends on the unconstrained participation of women in all aspects of social life. Participation requires that women and girls be assisted and encouraged to develop all of their capacities and that they maintain their ongoing physical, emotional, and spiritual health in order to contribute as equal partners with men to the advancement of civilization;

(c) Avoidable causes of maternal morbidity and mortality, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, depressive disorders, and violence against women take a heavy toll on the whole community. Women play fundamental roles in the education of children and in promoting the health of the family, both in the home and through organizations that promote and protect the health and well-being of the community. Healthy families and communities cannot be achieved without careful attention to creating conditions conducive to sustaining healthy girls and women;

(d) Consideration must be given to the health of women throughout their lifespan. They must be ensured adequate nutrition, especially in the early years, and protected from harmful traditional practices through the teenage years and into adulthood. The health of older women must also be paid special attention. With the marked increase in life expectancy for women, their right to physical, mental and spiritual health must be safeguarded.

The Bahá'í International Community has been active in the process of improving the health of women and girls. Much of this work includes raising awareness of the rights of women and girls, raising the discussion of issues to the level of principle, and applying those standards at the local, national, and global levels. We stand ready to continue to protect and promote the health of women and girls and are eager to collaborate with the Commission on the Status of Women, other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations in doing whatever will enable women to contribute their share to the advancement of civilization.

The writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha state that the world of humanity has two wings — one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible.